

## **READER'S VIEW**

**Mr. Laird Stone**

**7/3/02**

The State Board of Education recently took action to appoint a subcommittee to review the policies and procedures by which the Board regulates funding for athletic programs at our four-year, public institutions (BSU, ISU, LCSC, UI). This discussion followed our annual review and approval of the athletic operating budgets at each institution, which showed that a little over half of the total athletic revenue statewide is not generated by the athletic programs, but rather, comes from state and institutional sources and from student fees.

The Board entered into this discussion of athletics with trepidation, suspecting it may result in emotional and fearful responses from the public. After all, college athletics are a part of our culture. It is hard to find anyone who hasn't weathered a chilly Fall afternoon to cheer on their favorite football team. Members of the State Board of Education have these same memories. However, as appointed Trustees for these institutions, the Board views this exercise as part of our responsibility in governing the college and universities, and ensuring that the educational needs of Idaho students are met. This review is no different than a review of other campus programs, such as Nursing, Business or Graduate Programs.

Looking at policies related to athletics is not a new endeavor for the Board. In 1987, the Board put in place a policy that limits the amount of state general fund support that can go to athletic programs, and as recent as 2000, the Board placed limits on the amount of other institutional funds that can be used for athletics. Additionally, we provide that only dedicated student activity fees can be used to fund athletic programs. We have periodically reviewed policies related to athletic funding in the past, and have determined it is time to review our policies once again. Unfortunately, our action has resulted in premature reports that we are eliminating intercollegiate sports in Idaho, something that will likely have a negative impact on existing programs during already difficult times.

The answers that we are searching for are not predetermined. We are not looking for justification to end Idaho's participation in intercollegiate competition. We are not creating this issue to put pressure on the Legislature or the Governor to increase funding to higher education. No decisions have been made, just a call to gather information on the issue for future consideration. The information gathered will include all aspects of the issue, including the effect of athletic programs on student participants and the student community, scholarships, private fundraising, as well as the economic impact of athletics on local communities. The primary mission of our higher education institutions is for teaching and learning. We recognize that athletics play a role in the teaching and learning of life skills; thus, we will explore how college athletics fit into this mission, how they contribute to the educational environment, and if there are ways to improve their contribution. We will look at the successes of each program at each campus, along with

options for reforms to the system to best utilize the dollars going to each institution, and the focus of those dollars to optimize the success of the varying athletic programs. Without gathering this information, we can only assume we are doing the right thing with our current system and funding mechanism. Relying only on assumptions without factual information is not a proper fulfillment of our responsibilities as a Board.

As the Board member appointed to chair this subcommittee to look at college and university athletics, I have no preconceived notions of where the information we gather will take us. As an Idaho native and active participant in sports of all types at numerous levels, I come to this issue with a great love of athletics. I coach youth sports, and am a regular spectator and supporter of my local college and high school sporting events. As an alumnus of the University of Idaho, I continue to follow their sporting teams as a way to reconnect with my alma mater. I have faith that the citizens of Idaho understand why the Board is paying due diligence to this issue, and why it is a necessary exercise as we strive to ensure the very best higher education experiences and opportunities for students here in Idaho.

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